

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of June 21, 2021
Planning Commission Meeting

In advance of this meeting, Governor Phil Scott's lifted his State of Emergency declaration. As the meeting had already been publicly noticed as a remote meeting, that format was used. The Zoning Administrator's office was opened and offered as a gathering spot for anyone wishing to attend the meeting "in-person."

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm by Chair Hill-Eubanks.

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Commissioners Laura Hill-Eubanks, Ruth Ruttenberg, Nancy Peck and Chandra Blackmer. Aaron Rhodes was absent. Also present: Clerk Mitch Osiecki and Town Manager Jeff Schulz (joined at 7:07).

Public Participation: Introductions were made and guests were welcomed to the meeting.

Set/Adjust Agenda: Will discuss return to in-person meetings.

Approval of Minutes: Ruth moved to approve minutes of May 5; Nancy seconded.

Motion passed, 3-0-1 (Blackmer abstained).

Zoning Regulation Discussion: Jeff was invited to the meeting to share his thoughts on various topics related to the PC's review of current zoning regulations. Several topics were discussed, including:

- Develop Universal Broadband – Select Board is supportive of the CV Fiber. PC members are curious how many residents are served by TransVideo. Also, how many residents live outside TransVideo's service area? Is TDS an option? It's not clear whether TDS serves roughly the same coverage map as TransVideo.

Residents not served by TransVideo don't have access to coverage of Select Board meetings. Sentiment expressed that there should be outreach to State Reps/Senators to advocate for the town.

Jeff noted that TransVideo has expressed public support for the mission of CV Fiber. Ray Pelletier is Northfield's representative on CV Fiber. Might be worth inviting him to a meeting.

CV Fiber meets monthly. They have a web site. It might be worthwhile to do some research to see what types of things they are working on.

- Improve sidewalks and walking paths – Town has received a grant from AOT to pay for upgrades to sidewalks between Norwich University and the downtown. Also considering: path to Dog River Park & path to connect Northfield Falls and downtown. May apply for a grant for one of these projects in Spring of 2022.
- Promote public transportation – Select Board is broadly supportive, but financing could be a challenge.
- Promote transparency in government – Ruth Ruttenberg asked if more documentation of town proceedings can be posted on line.
- North Main Street Bridge – Two years ago, AOT was convinced to move replacement of this bridge up the priority list. A scoping study has been completed. Full bridge replacement has been approved. Design, permitting are now in the works, including sidewalks, railing & lighting.

The state will fund 90-95% of the project cost.

Project is likely to be slated for 2024. Jeff noted that there are some 27 bridges in Northfield.

Chandra Blackmer asked about repaving of Northfield Falls section of Route 12. Uncertain of exact date, but likely to occur in the next few years.

- Path connecting Northfield Falls to Village
NRRC has this high on their priority list. Will likely apply for scoping study funding soon.
- Improve energy efficiency of town buildings, equipment and vehicles
Town has recently conducted energy audit of Library. Other public buildings could also be candidates.

There is interest in adding more charging stations. Norwich University has recently added a few.

Town vehicles replaced by electric? Jeff noted that most town vehicles are trucks, which is a challenge. The town's meter-reading vehicle is slated to be replaced soon. An EV is certainly worth exploring.

Park and Ride? Could a portion of the Tops parking lot be designated as a P&R? Possibly. Perhaps involve Dan Currier?

Nancy Peck asked about doing energy audits of other town-owned buildings (EMS building, fire station). Jeff agreed that the town can certainly look into doing energy audits of other buildings.

Covered storage of sand? Sand is currently stored in two locations: near ballfield in Northfield Falls and ???

Composting facility? Would need additional personnel to monitor. Currently some is accepted at the transfer station.

- Update Hazard Mitigation and Emergency Operations Plan
Plans are currently updated every five years. Last done about three years ago. CVRPC usually notifies town when these plans are due for an update.
- NU and the town negotiated a 5-year PILOT agreement about four years ago. Will likely renegotiate soon. NU has a new CFO who has indicated interest in discussing zoning changes. Previous PILOT negotiation took about four months to complete.
- Establish an advisory role in local permitting for Conservation Commission.
Can certainly discuss, but will need to be careful to avoid overreach. Don't propose more oversight than Select Board will be comfortable with.
- Form a committee of neighborhood residents, students, NU officials, landlords, and town officials to resolve conflicts when they arise. Worth engaging in a discussion. Support for structured process. New NU president seems engaged and interested in being involved. Select Board would likely support establishment of a body for this purpose. PC could probably take the lead on this effort.
- Obtain sewer service for Northfield Falls
Cost: \$4-\$5 million
Ruth commented that lack of sewer is a big obstacle to development of NF. Jeff advised that the NF community will have to make the case for such an effort to the SB. Grant funding is likely available. Will have to explore whether there is political will among community to advance this idea.
- Explore feasibility and potential cost-savings of partnering with neighborhood communities to regionalize municipal services such as public safety, emergency response and recreation.

There was a pus for something like this a few years ago. The effort wound up dissolving over territorial issues. Eventually tried scaling the effort back to just emergency dispatch services.

Many local police departments are significantly understaffed. VSP is down about 65 positions from a full staff of about 180.

- Any zoning issues? Junk is a real problem. One tool that can be employed is to approach the issue as a health or public safety issue. Still, not at all a simple fix.

Mitch will explore how other towns have sought to address this problem.

Question from Ruth: PC anticipates applying for a small planning grant to support update of zoning regulations. Will SB support this? Jeff responded that he can probably approve such a request himself.

- Select Board is curious about PC's schedule for updating regulations. Timeline will depend on whether PC pursues municipal planning grant.

PC is also curious whether the SB has particular areas of concern with respect to zoning regulations.

Jeff departed meeting at 8:40.

Other Business: Discussion of meeting format going forward. Many bodies are planning to adopt a hybrid approach. Should explore rules with respect to requesting mask usage and vaccination status with resumption of in-person meetings.

Check availability of the Community Room of Brown Public Library. If available, could easily host in-person meetings, with plenty of room for social distancing, while also supporting streaming of meeting. (Select Board is currently meeting in this fashion).

Should also reach out to Stephen Toce to see if he's available to attend the July meeting.

Next Regular Meeting: July 7, 2021 at 7:00 pm.

Adjournment:

Nancy Peck moved to adjourn; Ruth Ruttenberg seconded. **Motion passed, 4-0-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:54 pm.